

**Preparation... the key to *interviewing* success.  
Interviewing tips including Zoom and Panel interviews.  
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Alexander Graham Bell said, Preparation is the key to success, and I say it is the key to *interviewing* success.

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Two themes: 1. **How doing great research** before your interview or a networking meeting...will absolutely separate you from the pack. 2. Tips on managing the interview whether in person, on the phone or Zoom.

Think about how many hours you spend getting ready for an interview or networking meeting?

- Most of your competition spends about 2 to 3 hours preparing for these meetings.
- So...how much time should you spend preparing for an **interview or networking meeting**? 8 hours minimum....the "A" Players spend 16 hours and sometimes more.
- **I know, you are thinking what the heck am I doing for 8 or 16 hours?**

**Well, there are at least 50 things you can do to be prepared and I will cover them throughout this paper.**

- Let me address, why the same prep time for a networking meeting, as an interview, especially when I have known the person I am meeting with for years?

Let me answer it with a story about one of my executive clients. Jane had a really great networking opportunity with a CEO she had known for years. We agreed to debrief. She called and I said, "how did it go?" She said, "awful!" What happened? She said, "it turned into an interview and I wasn't prepared." Sadly, this happened several times, early, in my executive coaching career so I have now built it into my coaching advice. I tell all clients: **Every networking meeting can turn into an interview!**

**Last caution:** You are about to meet with a networking friend you have known for years and if there was an opportunity they would have certainly given you a “heads up.”

**Yes... but!** What if the morning you were meeting with your friend, a key player resigned? They may not have had time to give you a heads up and even if they did that morning **you would NOT have time to prepare for an interview!**

The **first thing** I want to cover is **deconstructing** the good old job description [JD].

What do I mean by **deconstructing**? It is literally going through the JD word by word, line by line and making notes. I will cover this in detail on next page.

What follows is content from an Abbott Laboratories job description [JD] for a Financial Analyst. I have broken it down into bite size pieces.

The JD opens with this statement, as most job descriptions do. As you know, it is usually an overview but often contains “gems.” “Gems” are in **bold**.

### **Abbott JD Opening Paragraph**

*“The point-of-care (POC) testing industry is **changing faster than ever**. At Abbott Point of Care, we’ve **stayed ahead of the curve**. We are a **worldwide leader in fundamentally changing healthcare delivery at the point of care with solutions that are intuitive, innovative, reliable, and cost-effective for our customers.**”*

### **Deconstructing the opening paragraph of the JD:**

After every key word or phrase hit the space bar and type your notes or just insert examples from your experience. This document now becomes the “Cliff Notes” for your interview.

*“The point-of-care (POC) testing industry [**insert your experience with POC**] is changing faster [**insert your experience with speed of change**] than ever. At Abbott Point of Care, we’ve stayed ahead of the curve [**insert your experience staying ahead of the curve**]. We are a worldwide leader in fundamentally changing healthcare delivery at the point of care\* with solutions that are intuitive\*, innovative\*, reliable\*, and cost-effective\* for our customers [**Here I would hit the space bar and make comments on after each \***].”*

### **Second paragraph of the JD:**

*“Abbott Point of Care has a new opening for Financial Analyst. This role will support “global consolidation” for this business.*

**Now make notes .....where you supported “global consolidation.”**

**Last example, since I know you now have the point I am making.**

*“Responsibilities include preparing analysis for business reviews\*, managing finance schedules\*, building spreadsheets\* and ad hoc reporting.\* [**Here I would, again, hit the space bar and make comments after each \***]*

**Summary:** There will not be a question, from any job description, you can't "ace."

Let's move on to **the 50 additional things you can do.**

LinkedIn [ LI ]. LI is a no brainer BUT in my experience, working with executives, most do not mine all the gold in a LI profile.

First, the obvious:

- Who of your first level connections work at your target companies?

Now, the not so obvious:

- Looking at the profiles of the people you will interview with. Please look at their job history....any links to you? You may know folks who worked at the interviewer's previous employer(s). OR...you may have both worked at the same company in the past!
- Schools they have attended. Again, any links?
- Do they have 500+ connections or just 7....why is that important? 500+ means they are "into" networking. 7....probably NOT.

The next suggestions will give you material for a **great opening interview line**....whether in person, on the phone or in an email.

For Example: Do they or the company have a Blog? [ Roughly 50% of the Fortune 200 have blogs. ] If yes, your opening line could be: "Read your blog and really liked your approach to sustainability."

- Do they have any publications you can read? If yes, comment on them.
- Have they won any awards? If yes, be sure to compliment them or at least comment on them.
- What causes do they care about?

You may care about the same cause....Again, great material for an opening line.

- Who are they following? Do they follow companies, organizations or people.... you follow?
- Do they list places they have volunteered? Any link to your volunteering experience?
- Be sure to read their recommendations....what are the key qualities people are mentioning about them? Any themes?
- If, anyone, you are meeting with, are not in your LI be sure to ask them to connect as part of your follow-up.

- If it is a job interview, is there a LI Job Description? If yes.... LI tells you your first level LI connections who work at the company. LI also tells you the alumni from any schools you went to who work there.
- You can begin to see how the hours are adding up? AND this is just LI.

Friendly reminder: Review the LI profiles of everyone on the interview schedule, no matter what their level.

Company Website.....Go through every page with a fine tooth comb!

Again, the obvious reasons:

- Current openings. Anything you could be a candidate for?

Not so obvious:

- Who .....are they hiring? Are they hiring salespeople?
- Are they adding to IT? Why?
- Are they adding to Finance? Why?
- What might this data mean?

Now I am going to give you a tip that will blow away any HR manager and any hiring manager!

Do you have anyone in your network who could be a candidate for any of their postings?

**Nothing and I mean nothing** will impress HR or the hiring manager more than bringing them potential candidates.

Other key areas to pay attention to:

- Profiles of the executives and the Board. You see their pics. You get a quick feel for their ages. Often, they give you a great career sketch and sometimes personal interests and family info. Tip: Their bio or career sketch is NOT always obvious. You often have to click on their name, it is usually a hotlink to their bio.
- Look closely at the company mission, values and sustainability statements. HR, Managers and Executives love to be complemented on them .....because many times... they were involved in crafting one or more of them and sometimes are one of the reasons they choose to join the company.

On the company website, please pay attention to....

- Pictures of employees. They can reveal tips on diversity, age and dress code.
- Company history.....is there anything unique?

- On the career page...many companies like Goldman Sacks and J&J have tutorials on what they look for in candidates, how their interview process works and even questions they like to ask.
- Review all recent press releases.
- Read their financials...many public companies put the financials on their website.
- Read their blogs....some companies have both company and employee blogs.

Like your LinkedIn research, the company web page can also give you great opening lines! HOWEVER... this research isn't just about opening lines...it gives you great material to weave in as appropriate throughout the interview.

### Google

The obvious:

- Googling the people you will be meeting with.

This may be obvious but I can't tell you how many of my clients....before I started coaching them...had not done this. Google can often reveal things LI doesn't.

- If a public company, Google to access their 10Q and 10k. These may also be on the company site.

### Not so obvious uses of Google

- Are there blogs about the company?
- Is there any digital dirt on the company?
- Always, always, always Google this: What are customers saying about the company and what are employees saying?
- Google: what are the major issues in this company? What are the major issues in this industry? Who are the major companies in this industry? Who are the company's major competitors?
- Who are the fastest growing companies in this industry?

### Additional Research

- **Have you emailed everyone in your network** to see if they know the person[s] you are meeting with...including your friends and relatives? Why friends and relatives? You never know who they may know. True story. A client grew up on a Nebraska farm and none of her relatives ever worked in industry so why bother to ask them if they know anyone at your target companies? Turned out her Aunt played bridge with the mother of the most senior female executive at AOL and was able to get her a meeting with the AOL executive. Another true story. A client asked his 80 year old cousin if he knew anyone at Microsoft. Her response was "no" BUT my next door neighbor works at Microsoft!

- **The Email to EVERYONE** in your network is short and sweet. Subject line: Networking help. Message: Just two quick questions: Do you know anyone who works at American Express? And do you know Sally Johnson, VP Finance? [17 words] Send to everyone in one email but use BCC box as it hides everyone's email address. Please don't bother them with details...no one loves emails with details!

Guarantee you will get at least 4 responses, some clients get may more.

- Use GlassDoor to see what people are saying about the company and to see how the CEO is rated.
- YouTube: There are videos on every conceivable subject by the experts! This is not your kids YouTube. For example, if you are interviewing a company that is focusing on cybersecurity or The Cloud. Look for YouTube presentations on these subjects. It is always by the foremost experts.
- Do you have any connections with Thought Leaders or movers and shakers in Education. If yes, have you reached out to them to discuss the company or industry you are targeting for their inputs, ideas and people they may introduce you to?

#### Additional Sites To Check Out

Voilanorbert.com

- Fifty **free searches** to try it. 1000 email addresses a month for \$49. Cancel anytime. This is worth checking out.

ZoomInfo

- They are a B2B lead generation and prospecting data base.....any of you prospecting?
- 202M professional and executive profiles, many with email addresses.
- 10M business profiles.....so a great targeting tool.
- **They offer a free trial.**

Hoovers

- Data is Dunn and Bradstreet's
- 85M corporations, 100M people, 1000 industries.
- **Free trial**....HOWEVER you cannot get it as an individual...so make up a company name.

#### **OK.....So how does this stuff make you a better candidate.**

- At the most practical level: when they ask....why are you interested in this job or company....you now have some really intelligent things to say.....across a broad array of subjects.
- You can also talk about what they are doing well.....and not so well.
- It allows you to ask great questions. Both complimentary as well as "tough" questions.

Examples:

- Complimentary: I noticed you have had several quarters of great sales. May I ask what is driving that?
- Tough: You have had a couple of tough quarters. May I ask what were the key causes? What is the recovery plan?
- Complimentary: Sounds like your recent product launch was a huge hit. What is the projected growth and/or revenue
- Tough: I noticed on several blogs employees are talking about high turnover in the senior management ranks. May I ask what is your view of this turnover?

FACT: One of the **biggest mistake's** candidates make is they don't ask tough questions. So when the interviewing team gets together and discusses you.....the dialogue goes like this....we really liked Mary but she didn't ask very good questions.

Please remember:

1. **Successful organizations** want to hire critical thinkers and people who are organized and prepared.
2. **Successful organizations** DO NOT ....I repeat...DO NOT...want employees who just tell them what they want to hear. If they do ....RUN ...don't walk... away from that opportunity.

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**Interviewing tips** including Zoom and Panel interviews.

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Subtly control the interview by doing this:

- For the screening interview: Mary, before we get started may I ask what attracted you to my resume?
- For the hiring manager: Mary, before we get started would you mind sharing with me the two or three most immediate issues this position will face?
- When asked the "tell me about yourself" question, **always say** I would love to. What would you like me to focus on?

Tips for being a good interviewee. Most you know, so please view this as a checklist.

1. Look like the professional they want to hire. Best way to do this is, dress like they do! However always ask what the interview dress code is and most important how does the hiring manager dress because that's who you want to mirror.
2. As covered in the first half of this paper, do your research on the company, industry, products, competition and trends.

3. Be on time.....NO be early! When interviewing in person build extra time into the commute.
4. Avoid clichés: “I am a quick learner,” “I’m a good listener,” “I think outside the box.”
5. Be enthusiastic but don’t overdo it.
6. Answer every question you can **with a story and numbers**. The story being an example of exactly how you actually handled something similar [NOT how you would!].
7. Listen and take notes. Be sure to ask permission to take notes. If you have an iPad use the electronic pencil. It immediately erases any concern about your tech savvy.
8. Anticipate questions and keep your answers short. After a brief answer [which I know is a challenge for most of us] ask.....Joan was that what you were looking for? Better to be brief. Once you have “over answered” you can NEVER take the words back.
9. Follow-up with an **influencing** email. It is NOT a thank you note. Again, no clichés like “thank you for your time.” Go right for what was meaningful for you. For example, “Nancy I really appreciated your candor about the immediate issues this position will face. Fortunately, in my last job I faced very similar challenges.” You can also use the **influencing** email to clarify an answer you were not happy with. Example: Mary, I have given your question about collaboration more thought and want to add.....
10. Remember you are the interviewers equal. Do not act subordinate because, for many, it is a sign of lack of confidence.
11. Once you are a finalist focus your answers on why this job is right for you and right for the company.

**I covered this earlier but it is worth repeating.....**

### **Be an Authority on Industry Trends**

The truth is, typical job seekers merely browse the company website to prepare for an interview. Imagine the impact you will make if you are recognized as an "authority" on the industry trends. Even if you are changing industries, gaining recognition as an authority is easier than you might think.

### **Read Industry Blogs: What are Industry Leaders Saying?**

Learn about the impact of recent changes in the industry by finding out how leaders are responding.

Does the company have a Blog? [Roughly 50% of the Fortune 200 have blogs.]

Blogs hosted by knowledgeable individuals and companies contain an unbelievable amount of information. There are over 500M blogs in the world. Since sorting through such a vast amount of information can be intimidating, make it your goal to confirm 3 to 5 changes that are agreed upon by most industry insiders. Best way to do this is Google: what are the top Financial Services blogs? **TIP: When you join [not visit] a blog you have access to all the blog members emails!**

**Send an email to the writer of one of the blogs** that seems to have relevant content. Since the writer has positioned him or herself as an industry leader he or she will most likely be very approachable. You could also consider contacting the author of the blog to speak to them live on the phone if possible. Many authors publish their contact information and are encouraged to hear from their readers. Let the person know you have an interview and you will increase the likelihood that they will speak to you.

### **Call an Industry Insider: What is the Inside Opinion?**

Try to speak to someone who is personally involved in industry challenges. It could be a business owner, salesperson, or a customer service representative. Most people will be willing to help if you specify you are gathering information to help you prepare for an interview.

**Finally**, by uncovering and being able to articulate the top 3 to 5 industry issues, you may be perceived as an "industry insider." Your ability to "talk shop" nearly eliminates the fact you haven't actually worked in the industry.

## **PREP FOR A PHONE, ZOOM OR VIDEO INTERVIEW**

**FOR PHONE SCREENS WHERE THERE IS NO CAMERA USE AN "ANNOTATED" RESUME**

- **SEE BELOW FOR WHAT AN "ANNOTATED" RESUME LOOKS LIKE.**
- **USE YOUR "ANNOTATED" RESUME AS A CRIB SHEET FOR ANY PHONE INTERVIEW. THE CHANCES ARE THE PERSON YOU ARE TALKING WITH IS LOOKING AT A COPY OF YOUR RESUME.**
- **THE ADDITIONS IN RED ARE NOTES FOR YOU ONLY.**
- **THE NOTES ARE TAILORED TO THE JOB YOU ARE INTERVIEWING FOR.**
- **VIDEO INTERVIEWING TIPS FOLLOW ANNOTATED RESUME.**

**ANNOTATED RESUME**

**JILL SMITH**

203 888 8888

LinkedIn URL

js999@aol.com

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**Senior Marketing Professional**

*With over 10 years of experience in marketing communications, product launches, strategic relationships, and public relations.*

**Results**

**List and highlight the results appropriate to the company you are interviewing with.**

- “Best New Launch” Award in 2009

**List any other awards you have received.**

- Launched second new event **in less than seven months**
  - ◆ **Results: 25% higher attendance than two competitors**

**List other successful launches you have had.**

- P&L of \$5+ MM
  - ◆ **Increased operating margin 77% in 2009**
- **Two operating plan performance awards**
- **Increased strategic alliances 66%**
- Frequently chosen as spokesperson at major company events interfacing with electronic and print media
  - ◆ On-camera appearances with ABC and NBC; multiple radio interviews, including CBS Radio

**Expertise**

- Producing bottom-line results
- Business unit management
- Creating strategic partnerships
- Cross-functional team leadership
- Strategic and tactical planning
- Successfully launching products
- Branding
- Marketing Communications
- Public Relations
- Large-scale event management
- Excellent on-camera spokesperson

**Add any areas of expertise you have that will be of interest to this specific opportunity.**

**Recognized For**

- *Leadership* • *Integrity* • *Decisiveness* • *Discipline* • *Interpersonal skills* • *Sense of urgency*

**List other qualities and traits you are recognized for that will be of interest to this opportunity.**

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**ABC MEDIA, New York, New York**

**2000 – Present**

\$370M global business-to-business media company.

**Director, Major Conferences**

*Managed P&L of \$5M, two direct reports plus matrix responsibility for 10 professionals.*

- **In first 30 days turned around relationship with key vendor.**
- Took charge of late marketing campaign on CRM launch and managed successful execution, leading to company-wide “**Best New Launch**” Award during first three months of tenure.

**RESUME CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE**

- **Launched successful new event in less than seven months**, including branding, web site development, pricing, negotiation of celebrity Conference Chair, content development, and all sales and marketing efforts.
- **Increased operating margin 77% on CRM event in 2009.**

**Add any other accomplishments you have had, in this job, that will be of interest to this opportunity.**

XYZ EXHIBITION COMPANIES, New York, New York

1994 – 2000

\$200M exhibition division of a world-leading publisher and information provider.

**Director, Industry Development**

*Hired as Public Relations Manager; promoted in 11 months to Director, Industry Development. Managed four professionals and annual budget of \$1.8M.*

- Grew International Vision Expo conference programs to **largest attended conferences in company.**
- Managed relationships, including contract negotiations, with **25 industry associations.**
  - ◆ Results: Achieved **66% increase in strategic partnerships.**

**Add any other accomplishments you have had in this job that will be of interest to this opportunity.**

**Additional Tips**

- Make notes about **all** your job transitions. This means answering these questions. Why did you join ABC, Inc? Why did you leave ABC?
- Interviewers will often ask: What was your key learning at ABC? What was one of your failures or disappointments at ABC?

**VIDEO INTERVIEWING TIPS**

- Practice with someone who will give you candid feedback. Your focus should be on eye contact, body language, voice level and your enthusiasm.
- To ensure great eye contact, **contrary to popular advice**, is to look the interviewer on your screen in the eye. If you look at your camera you look like you are looking slightly up.
- If you are not a natural smiler put something next to the camera lens that makes you smile.
- Run through it a few times until things start to feel natural.
- Create your own teleprompter. You can post notes on your keyboard, the wall in front of you or on a small easel right on your desk. For the wall I recommend flip chart sized notes. **Key here** is to practice with someone who can tell you how you look when glancing at your notes. have the notes right behind the camera so no one can tell you are looking at notes.

On the day of your interview, please review this checklist:

- Ensure you won't be interrupted! Put notes on both your home office door and your front door.
- Clear your desk, except for a notepad and pencil for taking notes.
- If phone only, have a copy of your "annotated" resume [explained above] and any other helpful notes ready for you to reference. EG Your answer to the "strengths and weaknesses" question or "why do you want to work for us?"

- Have something you like to drink. [In an attractive glass] If you were interviewing in their office they would offer you something to drink.
- Computer tips:
  - Audio and camera working?
  - Close all your open tabs.
  - Don't have anything downloading in the background
- Silence any phones you will not be using.
- Have a clutter free neutral background behind you.
- Ask whomever you practice with about how the lighting looks.

With technology, there's always a chance things could go wrong. Here are some backup plans to have ready just in case.

- **If your video or audio stops working**  
Before the interview, ask the interviewer for a phone number where you can reach them if you experience technical difficulties. If the video cuts out, call them at that number. Ask if you can continue the interview by phone or if you can reschedule.
- **If noise interrupts the conversation**  
If noises (sirens, construction, etc.) interrupt your video interview, apologize for the interruption and ask for a few moments until the noise has subsided. You may want to mute the microphone if the noise is severe.
- **If someone enters the room unexpectedly**  
If family members, housemates or pets enter the room while you're interviewing, apologize to the interviewer, ask for a few moments, mute your microphone and turn off your camera, and then step away to deal with the interruption. Make sure that the room is secure before beginning the interview again.

As with any job interview, you should conclude by thanking the interviewer for their time. Send a follow-up thank you email later that day (or the next day if your interview was in the evening). This message may help build a stronger connection with your potential employer and help you progress to the next step.

### **Zoom Interviews**

- Making sure you look great: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hccoy6ovsJQ>

This YouTube focuses on women but the principles are the same.

Continues on next page

- From Indeed: **18 Tips for Succeeding During Your Zoom Interview**

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/zoom-interview>

- From WIRED: How to Ace an Online Job Interview

<https://www.wired.com/story/tips-for-online-job-interviews/>

## Panel Interviews

Panel Interviews tips. See links below.

Panel interviews, if well run, are much easier than a 1:1 interview. They are far less stressful. The guidelines usually are, “take your time” and please ask us to clarify if you aren’t clear about a question. The Panel Interview also protects you from the “odd duck” in the room who sees you differently from everyone else.

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-have-a-successful-panel-interview-4047907>

<https://theinterviewguys.com/nail-panel-interview-questions-answers-included/>

<https://careersidekick.com/ace-your-panel-interview/>

*GOOD LUCK!*



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*“Energy and persistence conquer all things.” Ben Franklin*